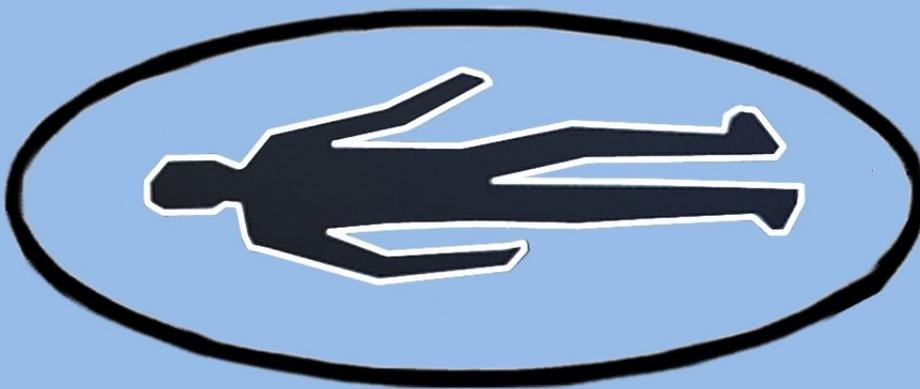


# DEADLY CIRCLE

*A Mystery*

*By William Trepas*



*Cover by Tuscan Sky Publishing*

# **Deadly Circle**

*by*

***William Trepas***

**First e-book edition**

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## Chapter 1

She began to circle slowly; feeling the updrafts under her wings, she had only to move a few feathers at the tips slightly to control her position.

Now, what had the others of her kind found. Her wrinkled red head bent toward the ground; yes, there was the tasty bit, and it was of good size. She was late in joining the orbiting flight of turkey buzzards, but none were yet on the ground. She had not completed her first orbit when she saw a lower bird making a spiraling descent. One of the more aggressive of her kind and aided by a gnawing hunger, she coiled down after the first bird.

Something was wrong. The one below her had broken its descent and was flapping wildly to gain altitude. She continued downward, an instinctive fear emerging in her marble sized brain. No movement...no danger...yet...fifty feet from the ground her wings churned the air frantically in uncontrolled panic. Up...get away...get away.

The Ranger parked his green four wheel drive pick-up in the fringe of ponderosa pines at the eastern edge of the meadow. He got out with his binoculars and closed the door that held the quail emblem of the Arizona Game and Fish Department. A half inch of snow, the first of the fall season, frosted the ground.

“Now, why are those damn vultures acting so strange?” he muttered to no one. “Somebody poaching between seasons?”

He raised his ten-by-fifty glasses and focused on the center of the meadow. A spot bare of snow had caught his eye.

“Holy mackerel!”

He jumped back into the truck. Dirt and gravel spun from beneath the tires as he drove on the unpaved road to the closest spot to the center of the meadow. Out of the four-by-four, he ran. Half way into the meadow he stopped abruptly. The hair on the back of his neck felt funny as he quickly looked all around.

In front of the ranger lay a perfect thirty foot circle, devoid of snow, and lying on its face in the center was a crumpled human form.

He hesitated before approaching the form and looked all around carefully. He had a strange reluctance of entering the circle.

“Come on boy. Let’s get it done,” he spoke, prodding himself.

Straight to the form he went, and turned it over. He jumped back involuntarily, and the ranger’s yell echoed through the surrounding canyons.

“You poor son-of-a-bitch.”

The Ranger had intended to take a pulse to see if there was any sign of life. That would not be necessary. The eyes were wide and bulging in surprise or terror. The lips were drawn back exposing the teeth as if frozen in a scream. Stiff with rigor mortis, the arms were extended over the head in a gesture of surrender. A bright red spot was centered on his forehead.

The ranger knew him.

“I don’t know what got you, Bob, but it must have sure been something.” The ranger turned the body back onto its face gently. “I shouldn’t have moved the remains. Well, too late to think about that now.”

He walked backwards, trying to put his feet in the same places, until he was out of the circle. He turned then and strode quickly to the truck.

The door was standing open and the engine running. The first thing he did was reach in and take his pistol and gun-belt from the seat.

“This sure as hell has me spooked,” he muttered to himself while he cinched the buckle to his gun-belt.

Though he was a law enforcement officer, he seldom wore his revolver. He checked the cylinders, returning the empty one under the hammer.

“If you can’t get it done with five, don’t try.” He had seen too many hunters shot with weapons that weren’t supposed to fire, but did.

He felt more comfortable with his gun on. He reached into the cab and grabbed the hand mike off the dash. A few deep breaths of the pine fragrant air to calm his nerves and voice.

He keyed the transmitter.

“Dispatch...this is Jim.”

“I read you, Jim. Go ahead.”

Jim cleared his throat. “That you, Harry?”

“It sure is. What you need Jim?”

“I’m out at the meadow near the junction of forest roads two-thirty-five and four-seventy.

I've got a Nine-0-One-H. Notify the DPS (Department of Public Safety-Arizona State Police) and the Sheriff's Office."

"Don't give me your damn police codes, Jim. I'm no ex-cop like you. Just tell me what you got."

"You ought to you ass-hole. We work enough man-hunts with them," Jim said before keying the transmitter. "Okay, Harry. It's a DB. Tell them they will need crime kits and cameras."

"You mean a dead body?"

"Yes, Harry. Now cool it. You know how many radio scanners there are in this area."

"A murder! Hot damn! This will put some excitement in our lives."

"Knock it off, Harry. Just make the calls. Out."

"Jim."

"Jim."

"Jim."

"Just make the calls, Harry. I'll give you all the details later."

"Okay. Out."

Jim shook his head as he leaned back into the pickup to hang up the mike.

Harry, the old fart, always had to know everything, and he'd blab it everywhere.

Jim took his rifle off of the hooks in the back window and slid the bolt half open. The magazine was full and the chamber empty. It was ready if he needed it. Jim liked this weapon: a Remington six-hundred, nice and light, even with the scope on it, chambered for three-o-eight rounds. It would stop an elk but it kicked like a mule.

Jim placed the rifle back on the hooks, went to the front of the truck, and leaned against the fender as he surveyed the meadow.

On the south side of the meadow, the road he was on ran the full half mile length. The road was two-hundred yards from the southern edge of the meadow and then the ponderosa pines began and thickened as the ground sloped upward. A side canyon entered the meadow a short distance to the west.

Three-hundred yards to the north of the road, the meadow ended in an abrupt wall of jumbled boulders with an intermittent stream at its base that wandered off to the west. Above the thirty foot wall of boulders, the pines began, and the ground again rose gently.

Jim's eyes kept returning to the circle in the snow. He had been by here many times but had never noticed anything that could cause such an effect. He raised his binoculars and

studied the circle.

“It might have been made with a hot twenty foot fry pan. It’s edges are that sharp,” he said to himself.

Jim looked carefully at the snow surrounding the circle. It was warming up, and the snow was starting to melt. He saw animal tracks; none came closer than six feet to the bare circle.

“There’s coyote...must have been a pack of them...big birds, ravens probably...deer, even they were curious, but not curious enough to enter the circle.”

Jim lowered the glasses and rubbed his eyes. The snow glistened brightly in the morning sun. He raised the glasses again, and a shiver went up his spine as he looked at the grass inside the circle.

“It’s all bent over and swirled in a circular pattern...yow!”

Jim nearly jumped out of skin when something touched his shoulder. He dropped the glasses and grabbed for his gun as he turned. He had his revolver half out of the holster when he relaxed.

“What’s the matter, Jim? You always stand out in the woods talking to yourself?”

“You shouldn’t do that to a man. You damn near gave me a heart attack...and got yourself shot. You’re one sneaky Indian, Joe Raven. What the hell are you doing here anyway?”

“I’m camped about a quarter mile back in the woods on an old logging road. I heard you yell and your engine running. I came to see if you were all right. What’s going on?” Joe laughed. “A hundred years ago, and you’d be one dead paleface.”

Joe nodded his head toward the meadow. “Who is it and what happened?”

“Bob Adair. I’m not sure what happened, but he sure is dead.”

“Too bad. He was a nice man.”

“You knew him, Joe?”

“We talked, and our families got together sometimes. I guess you could say we were friends.”

“You know anything about this?”

“You mean, about what happened to Bob?” Joe shook his head, no.

There was a distant sound of sirens.

“Oh damn it!,” Jim said. “Harry sent the police, code-three.”

“I think I better be going....Jim, keep me out of this if you can.”

Jim nodded his head; he liked Joe Raven. “Say hello to the family for me. I’ll talk to you later.”

He watched Joe walk away and then followed him, placing his feet carefully over Joe's tracks. Jim went as far as the tree line where the tracks disappeared. He urinated and then returned to the truck.

Jim heard engine noise and saw a white Jeep Cherokee coming down into the valley from the north on the four-seventy road.

Jim smiled. "No siren for him."

He knew the Deputy Sheriff from the time they had both been Phoenix police officers.

They had left the pressure cooker of the Valley of the Sun within a year of each other, and both had ended up in the pine covered forests of Central Arizona.

The Blazer turned onto the two-thirty-five road, and Jim held up his arms stopping the Deputy two-hundred feet from him. He walked toward the Jeep on the edge of the road, so as to not mess up any tracks, if there were any on the road....any more than he already had.

Deputy Paul Carson stepped out of the vehicle and waited for Jim.

The two men greeted each other, and Paul said, "We didn't know what you had out here, Jim. All Old Harry could say was dead body, murder, get out there right away. I came in quiet with the DPS a few minutes behind me code-three. Another DPS car is coming in quiet from the other end of the two-thirty-five road...just in case we flushed anything out that way."

"Good procedure, Paul. Maybe you could give him a call and have him block the road at the west end of the meadow. If the locals had their scanners on, some of them may try to come out here."

Paul. leaned into his Jeep switched his radio to the DPS car-to-car frequency and sent the message. By the time he finished, two DPS cars arrived with red and blue lights flashing.

Jim waited for the DPS officers to join them and then explained the situation.

"The turkey buzzards were acting funny," Jim began. "There's been a few animal mutilations in this area, so I thought I'd check. I found what you see there."

Jim inclined his head toward the circle. "It's Bob Adair, a local, I turned him over and then put him back the way he was. I didn't see any blood or signs of a wound; but from the look on his face, I don't think he died a natural death."

"Let's take a closer look," Paul. said. "Before we get started, I have to decide whether to call the detectives in from Flagstaff."

"This is in your jurisdiction then?" Jim said. "I thought maybe the FBI..."

"No, this is the Sheriff's baby. It's on Federal land, of course, but we have a contract with the Government to handle law enforcement. We'll notify the Feds, but they seldom get

involved.”

Jim had led them down the side of the dirt road to his truck while they were talking. “The tracks going to the body are mine,” he said.

“What about those on the other side of the road?” Paul asked.

“I took a leak back there, didn’t want to mess the crime area.” Well, it wasn’t exactly a lie, Jim felt.

“What makes you so sure there was a crime?” one of the DPS Officers asked. “Could have been a stroke or heart attack.”

“You have to see the face,” Jim said. “Oh, I forgot to mention, there’s a strange red mark on the center of Bob’s forehead...almost like a burn...then there’s that damn circle. How did it get there?”

“Okay,” Paul said, “I’m going to call Flag and bring in the detectives. We better get some pictures before the snow is gone. He trotted back to his Jeep and returned in a few minutes.

“They are flying in by helicopter. Be here in about an hour, and they’re bringing a medical examiner.”

“Can we give you some help?” a DPS Officer asked.

“You sure can, Paul said. “I’d appreciate a second set of photos and some help sealing off the area with crime-scene tape.”

A considerable amount of investigative work was performed before the helicopter arrived.

The road was examined for tire tracks, but nothing you could make a cast of was found. The weather had been dry for a month before the previous nights brief snow fall; the dirt surface was packed rock hard.

The Weather Bureau had been contacted, and the time of the snow fall had been estimated at between one and two in the morning. It had been a fast moving weak cold front, that was now over New Mexico. High pressure was building behind the front; balmy weather was predicted for the next few days.

This was a common weather pattern for the Arizona high country, but it was more common in the Spring, though it sometimes occurred in the fall.

Soil samples, both inside and outside the circle, were bagged and tagged for forensic examination. Most of the snow had melted, though the strange circle was still clearly defined due to the swirling pattern in the grass.

Every bit of paper and all other man made objects were placed in plastic bags and carefully labeled. There were used paper match folders, cans, bottles, gum wrappers, pull

tabs; it was amazing how much flotsam there was in this remote place.

The deceased had a home in Ponderosa; a thousand acre community consisting mostly of summer homes. He had lived there with his wife, Diane, for three years.

Ponderosa lay five miles south of the crime seen on state highway two-sixty.

Paul Carson sent one of the DPS officers to notify the next of kin.

He was to pick up Paul's wife, Connie, inform her of the situation and let her do the actual disclosure to Bob's wife.

The DPS man had returned forty-five minutes later with disquieting news. The Adair home had been broken into. Diane was not there, but a quick check revealed that she was probably in Tucson, visiting relatives. Connie was working with the Tucson Police to locate her.

As the DPS man reported to him, Paul felt relieved that he hadn't brought the detectives out on a wild goose chase, but he also felt a concerned anticipation. This was not to be a simple case.

Paul asked the DPS man to return to the Adair home and keep watch until a deputy relieved him.

This location sat in the extreme south-eastern corner of Coconino County, and the nearest other deputy sheriff was located fifty miles away.

Having just finished radioing Flagstaff for additional help, Paul heard his receiver announce the arrival of the helicopter.

The pilot wanted a smoke-flare to mark his landing spot and show wind conditions.

Paul jogged to his car, got a flare, jogged into the meadow, to a place a hundred yards west of the circle. He was puffing as he set off the flare and told himself he had to do some road work.

The smoke twisted upward in a near vertical column, and the wop-whopping sound of the helicopter thundered the air as it soared in over the tops of the tall pines. The nose of the helicopter swung up and the whine of the engine changed pitch as it came to a hover. It began to settle slowly toward the meadow, festooned with bright yellow crime-scene tape blowing wildly in the down-wash of air.

Paul backed toward the circle, covering his eyes with his arm as the helicopter came down. The blast of air suddenly decreased when the pilot reduced pitch on the rotor blades; the scream of the turbine engine began to wind down.

Paul lowered his arm. The craft's doors slid open.

Four people exited the helicopter and approached him with the strange, knees bent, head

down, walk people use when under rotor blades.

Three of them were known to Paul: Carl Short and Fernando Juan Maria de Vargas, the detectives, Dr. Ludwig Hammerstrom, pathologist. The fourth introduced herself as Lorraine Barnard, from the district attorney's office: a Scandinavian looking blue eyed blond, a very attractive woman.

Paul barely had time to introduce himself when Carl Short broke in.

“What you got here, Paul, a UFO murder? How come you didn't mention that circle when you called in? I've seen pictures of circles like that; they're flying-saucer landing marks.”

Paul had seen such pictures too, and he suspected that Jim and the DPS men had also. There was a history of UFO sightings in the vicinity, even a couple of abductions.

None of them had wanted to be the first to mention it.

Carl had rattled on until, Fernando de Vargas had patted him on the head and said, “Let's keep that kind of talk out of the investigation, amigo, at least for now.”

END OF CHAPTER 1 Go to [www.tuscanskypublishing.com](http://www.tuscanskypublishing.com) to purchase this book.